

# **NEWS RELEASE**

United States Department of Agriculture • Natural Resources Conservation Service  
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## **USDA AMENDS TECHNICAL SERVICE PROVIDER RULE**

LANSING, Mar. 31, 2003-The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) today issued an amendment to the interim final rule for certifying third parties to provide conservation technical services for certain conservation practices.

The 2002 Farm Bill expanded the availability of technical assistance to producers by encouraging the use of third parties-called technical service providers-to assist USDA in delivering conservation technical services.

The amendment to the interim final rule for Technical Service Provider Assistance, published in the Federal Register on March 24, 2003 (with a correction to the extension date for receiving comments published in the Federal Register on March 31, 2003), sets forth a process for establishing payment rates for program participants to acquire technical services. In addition, the amendment clarifies the certification process and describes subcontracting by technical service providers in the course of their delivery of technical services.

"Establishing not-to-exceed payment rates and providing this information to program participants to help them choose competitively priced services will ensure that payment rates reflect current market conditions for delivery of technical services," said NRCS Chief Bruce Knight.

Not-to-exceed payment rates will be established nationally on a state-by-state basis for categories of technical services. To ensure consistency across state lines, NRCS will coordinate payment rates between adjacent states where similar resource conditions and agricultural operations exist, taking into account differences in state laws, the cost of doing business, competition and other variables.

The technical service provider certification process is a national certification process with uniform criteria and requirements. The online application form allows applicants to list each state where they wish to be considered for certification and to self certify that they will meet all applicable state and local laws and requirements for the services they provide.

The public comment period for the interim final rule for Technical Service Provider Assistance published in the Federal Register on Nov. 21, 2002, has been extended. Comments must be received by April 30, 2003. Comments on the amendment are due by June 30, 2003.

The amendment and interim final rule are on the Web at <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/farmbill/2002>. Information on technical service provider assistance including the online registry and cost survey can be found at <http://techreg.usda.gov>.

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The Natural Resources Conservation Service provides leadership in a partnership effort to help people conserve, maintain, and improve our natural resources and environment.

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